



Procurement Talent and the Destiny of Success

PETER SMITH - February 25, 2016 12:06 AM |

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We're pleased to feature another guest post from Sigi Osagie, a leading expert on effectiveness in Procurement & Supply Chain Management. He helps organisations and individuals achieve enhanced performance growth to accomplish their business and career goals, and is the author

*of the highly-acclaimed book **Procurement Mojo – Strengthening the Function and Raising Its Profile**. He can be contacted on www.sigiosagie.com.*

The feedback from the [recent BravoSolution webinar](#) I co-delivered with Peter Smith of Spend Matters was fantastic. Our guidance on Procurement talent and helping people find their destinies appears to have struck a chord. Perhaps it's a reflection of the growing appreciation of 'people capability' for Procurement success.

Old-school managers typically view people issues as “pink-and-fluffy stuff” to be handled by the HR department, a distraction from “the real job”. But savvy CPOs and other business leaders know otherwise; **talent that is well-nurtured and harnessed sensibly is the soul of a successful organisation.**

Talent isn't acquired nor sustained by serendipity. Nurturing talent takes effort, effort that must be focused to be effective. The prime requirement is to spend time fleshing out and defining the calibre of people required to achieve Procurement's goals – specifically, the competencies and levels of capability employees need to scale the mountain of success. This should be done properly and the requisite competencies defined formally. I've done this in different ways previously, dependent on the organisational context, e.g., in job descriptions, functional manuals and full competency models.

Whatever medium is used, it's important to make Procurement staff fully aware of the competency standards. If people are not clear on what's expected of them, it often leads to dashed expectations and suboptimal performance.

Setting the bar as such is priceless in helping any Procurement leader clear the cobwebs on the issue of talent. It's just as valuable for assessing incumbent staff and recruiting new talent if fresh blood is needed.

Such talent assessment often reveals some stars – high-potential individuals who’ve got more than what it takes. They must be given opportunities to do their thing, to shine, grow and advance. This is crucial; because if such individuals are not groomed correctly, they’ll more than likely leave to seek their destinies elsewhere.

People with oomph seldom stay with leaders or organisations that don’t bring out the best in them.

Applying a competency model or a simpler talent assessment also helps identify those with potential but requiring development support. Helping these staff up their game *isn’t always about conventional training*; coaching and mentoring are often potent interventions. *As the erudite Mr. Smith highlighted*, such folks can be a font of unrealised potential and hidden talent. Giving them development support aids their progress along the path of their career destinies.

Competency assessments can sometimes result in some individuals not making the mark. This can be an unavoidable consequence – some incumbents may not turn out to be the right people for the job, even with reasonable investment in employee development; it’s just not possible to fit a square peg into a round hole. Rather than trying to force things or carrying ‘fat’ in your Procurement organisation, it is far better to help such individuals find their destinies elsewhere. In the long run, this may turn out to be a blessing in disguise for them.

As well as clarifying the standards expected, it’s also important to give people a chance to prove their mettle. But don’t compromise on the standards, otherwise your Procurement capability and success will also be compromised, and the path of your functional destiny will lead to mediocrity.

Building people capability takes more than having the right talent. There are other essential aspects, like a sensible organisational structure; clarity of roles and responsibilities; *employee engagement*; *inspiring and motivating people*; *managing individual performance*; and *rewards and recognition*. It all comes down to effective leadership.

Some Procurement leaders are versed in purchasing but not adept at ‘leadership’, which is a different ball game entirely. I’m not talking about having an MBA or a PhD in “Strategic Procurement”. Academic credentials have value; my MBA was a key stepping-stone on my career journey. But I’ve learnt a lot more about effective leadership from the mentors I’ve had in my career, the leadership development programmes I went through at two organisations and the practice of ‘walking the talk’, including some challenging learning experiences.

Leaders can sometimes be blinded by their own inadequacies, egos or sense of self-importance, which hampers their ability to steer the organisation on a path of sustainable success. It creates an alternative destiny, like chasing pavements that lead nowhere. This crippling affliction typically manifests when a Procurement leader is a ‘purchasing geek’ rather than an effective ‘business leader’.

If you’re a Procurement leader, remember that your own leadership effectiveness is a component of “Procurement talent”. Actually, it is the cornerstone of creating a destiny of success for your Procurement function; because a fish rots from the head down. It is imperative that you invest time, effort and capital in honing your leadership game alongside helping your people grow wings for success. Procurement’s success will always be dependent on the calibre of leadership and people in the function; they shape the function’s destiny.